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AN ADDRESS

TO THE

CITIZENS OF MASSACHUSETTS,

ON THE

CAUSES AND REMEDY

OF OUR

NATIONAL DISTRESSES.



BY A FELLOW SUFFERER.



BOSTON :

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.....

1808.

ADDRESS.

IT is proper for us who are the citizens of a republican government, at all times to take an interest in the political concerns of our country ; to examine and reflect on the publick measures which have been adopted, or are recommended ; to avail ourselves of every means of ascertaining what the general good requires, and to determine where we ought to bestow our confidence, by comparing the conduct and avowed principles of those who occupy or are candidates for offices of publick trust, with the result of our reflections. But at a time when our national affairs are known to be involved in perplexity, when we find ourselves actually suffering serious evils, and are called upon to decide whom we shall choose as guardians of our country's welfare, it is particularly important that we should be active, inquisitive and conscientious, in the interesting duties we have to perform.

It is true that on such occasions imposture is ever busy, and the people ought not rashly to credit relations of new, pretended facts, which have a bearing on the views or measures of government ; but no man need be more afraid to reason, or to hear reason, on the approach of an election, than at any other season. The attempt, therefore, which undoubtedly some will make to prejudice readers against an impartial attention to this address, from the time of its publication, will be found by those who will peruse it, without any just cause. It shall be a plain appeal to the understanding of electors ; it shall be a discussion of subjects, with the circumstances of which the publick, generally, are already acquainted.

Every man knows that the prospects of the United States are at this moment more gloomy and alarming than has been experienced since our independence was achieved ; that the publick sufferings are great ; too great to be long endured, without the most distressing consequences. The object of this sketch is to shew that these calamities result, principally, from that system of politicks which our national administration have adopted ; to which they seem fatally wedded ; and from which we can hope for no relief, but by changing a majority of those who have had, or ought to have had, the direction of our national concerns.

It would not be difficult to prove that in many respects the innovations which have been practised for several years, in the management of our domestick relations, have produced much evil. But as the distresses which predominate, and the ruin which threatens us, depend on the state of our foreign connexions, we shall confine our remarks to them, and particularly to our relations with *Great Britain, France and Spain.*

The immediate cause of our sufferings is the arrest of our external commerce. The pretended objects of government in subjecting us to this measure have been, to *secure the persons and property of our citizens*, and to *coerce the belligerents of Europe to remove certain alledged grounds of complaint.* If the first was ever a motive in the minds of our rulers, it must have ceased to operate, ever since our merchants, whose interest was to be guarded by commercial restrictions, have been aware of the nature and extent of the danger to which they were exposed. This fact has been so fully and so frequently demonstrated, and is so obvious to every person's comprehension, further argument would be superfluous. As a measure of *coercion*, whatever may have been professed by its authors, the steps which the Executive has taken, the language used in Congress, the sentiments avowed in certain papers, and the feelings expressed by the partizans of Administration in every part of the union, prove unequivocally, that Great Britain is the object.

I shall not here expose the futility of the Embargo, or any other commercial restrictions, imposed with a view to coerce Great Britain. The consummate folly of that doc-

trine is already, or soon will be, manifest to every man in the United States. That the suspension of commerce deeply injures this country no one disputes. If it is an inefficient measure, as it respects Great Britain, it certainly cannot be justified, on any account. If it is a powerful measure, justice requires that it should not be adopted without just and serious cause of complaint; and expedience requires that it should injure her more than ourselves.

What reasons has America to pursue a system of virulent hostility towards Great Britain? The reasons offered are definite and familiar to the publick. The impressment of her seamen from our merchant ships; the restrictions she imposes on the colonial trade; the attack on the Chesapeake, and her recent Orders of Council.

First; *she claims the right of taking her own seamen, from neutral merchant ships.* There is not a maritime nation in Europe that does not practice the same. Nay more; it is both claimed and enforced by the United States. With what face then can this be alledged as a ground of contest? Great Britain never asserted a right to impress American citizens.

Secondly, *she claims the right of interdicting to neutrals the unaccustomed trade between her enemies and her colonies, either direct, or circuitous.* It is unnecessary to state on what principles, since she so qualifies the exercise of this right in favour of neutrals, as to leave them the whole profit of that trade. The additional expense to which neutral merchants are subjected, and the trifling allowance they pay to their own government from the colonial trade, are refunded by the consumer. The general principle of countries possessing colonies is to monopolize their trade in peace. If one belligerent, from having a superiour maritime power, presents insuperable obstacles to the colonial trade of the other, how far a neutral can rightfully interfere and remove such obstacles, is a question of great interest and much difficulty of adjustment, between Great Britain and the United States. On a point, however, so peculiarly delicate, in the present critical state of the world, Great Britain has explicitly offered to enter into an arrangement, by which the United States

would have, during the present war, all the pecuniary advantages they claim, and leave the question of right, as asserted by each party, wholly unaffected by the stipulation. After this offer on her part, no man can pretend that the colonial trade need be a subject of serious controversy, much less an occasion of hostility with Great Britain.

Thirdly; *the United States' ship Chesapeake was attacked by a British frigate.* That spirit which evinces a strict regard to national rights, a high sense of national honour, preferring even the risk of life to disgrace, is true patriotism; it is a spirit to be encouraged and admired; but it is not inexorable, and when falsely directed, it ceases to be a virtue; it becomes a crime. It is as wrong to reject atonement for an injury, as it is dishonourable to endure it without resentment. It is notorious that from the moment the attack on the Chesapeake was even reported in England, the British government displayed a strongly marked solicitude to ascertain the nature of the injury, to assure our government of their sincere disposition to make reparation, and to preserve peace and friendship between the two nations. This system of conduct was immediately commenced and unremittingly pursued, until her own character, among nations who were witnesses to her conciliatory efforts and their failure, required that she should proceed no further. The act of the individual was censured and discussed in every form necessary to give the disavowal force and character. The king by royal proclamation expressly forbade the commission of such acts; the government, though deeply occupied in a war for national existence, entered promptly and zealously into a negotiation with our minister; an accommodation, there, being found impracticable, owing to positive instructions from our executive, Great Britain still persevered, and sent an honourable embassy for the express purpose of offering to the United States ample atonement for the injury she had unintentionally done us. That this affair has not, long since, been amicably and honourably settled has been the choice of *our* government. It is therefore preposterous to adduce this as a cause of war.

Fourthly; there remains then but *her late orders of Council.* Great Britain has declared that the Berlin decree, would justify her, on the law of retaliation, in doing more, and

required all that she has done. That she is sincere in this declaration is evident, from this consideration. Had she simply proclaimed those ports and coasts in a state of blockade which were actually invested by her fleets, the same effect would have been the consequence, and no nation could have questioned the justice of her conduct. But she has met her enemy on the ground *he* had taken, and if we choose to complain, we must in equity direct our complaints against that power which set the example. By retaliating measures on her enemy in kind, Great Britain, has given us no cause of war.

Yet under these pretences the friendly relations between the United States and that country have been suspended; a non-importation act has been passed; a proclamation interdicting our ports to her ships of war has been issued, Embargo laws have been multiplied; and we are assured they cannot be annulled without resorting next to OPEN WAR! In short, the ruin of the United States appears to be a secondary consideration with our government, while the indulgence of a most malignant enmity towards Great Britain is the first. It cannot be believed that the people of this country concur with the present administration, in this pertinacious, unjust, and self-destructive hatred. The majority of our citizens undoubtedly wish for justice and no more; they are anxious to see harmony restored, on terms which shall secure to our nation its rights, and heal our wounded honour. Such terms Great Britain has proffered, and with a solicitude which evinces her sincerity. There is then no obstacle to an amicable accommodation, but the prejudices of those who control and intral our publick concerns. Is it not time, standing as we do, on the brink of ruin, to embrace the only means we possess of terminating the evils resulting from these prejudices, by placing government in the hands of men of pure, patriotick, and unbiassed principles?

But besides this steady and deep rooted enmity towards England, there is another cause of that crooked policy, which has involved our country in its present embarrassments. The conduct of our government towards France and her conduct towards us afford a perfect reverse to the picture we have given, tending however to the same end.

Here again I shall appeal to facts of publick notoriety. France has always interfered in the domestick politicks of the United States. She has directly interposed in our concerns with Spain, and for several years prevented an adjustment of our disputes with that nation. She has swindled our government in the sale of Louisiana, the boundaries of which remain undetermined. She has plundered, sunk and burnt our defenceless merchantmen on the ocean. She has seized, confiscated, and condemned, our vessels in her own ports and in the ports of Spain, contrary to the laws of nations. She has in a most outrageous manner violated her treaty with us, and that too with respect to the liberty of the seas, of which she hypocritically declares to the world she is the champion. She has insultingly dictated to our government the course they must take with regard to other nations—officially pronounced us at war with Great Britain, and seized the property of our citizens as a pledge of our acquiescence. She has issued decree upon decree against our commerce, in contempt of the most unquestionable principles of right; and under the sanction of her unjustifiable decrees, declared our merchant ships denationalized, and made our citizens prisoners of war. Such is the treatment we have received from France; and what has been the conduct of our government in return? Not merely patient and abject submission, for years, to her accumulating insults and injuries; but active friendship, undisguised partiality and zealous co-operation in her views. Her ministers are received and treated with cordiality; our national treasury is devoted to her service; her ships of war are welcomed to our ports, while her enemy's are interdicted; at her instance, we abandoned the lucrative trade of St. Domingo, and on a principle unwarrantable and unknown, our government punishes our citizens at home for acts committed within what France calls her jurisdiction. In fine, we actually make common cause with France in her war against the liberty of other nations, and have voluntarily adopted the same measures imposed by her on the conquered countries of Europe, except the open resort to arms in her favour, and even that has been repeatedly threatened. This slavish attachment to the cause of France, at the expense of our national rights, honour and prosperi-

ty, not only accords with, but explains, the hatred of our government towards England. This accounts for their declining her pacifick overtures ; conjuring up unfounded complaints ; rejecting a treaty with Great Britain, made by a minister with competent authority and acting within his instructions : And lastly, it explains the real cause of the embargo, the source of those distresses, which have spread dismay and consternation throughout the United States.

I hazard nothing in asserting, that this base disposition to truckle to the insulting, domineering conduct of France, this sacrifice of our national independence, our character and dearest rights cannot be approved by the mass of the people of this country, of any party. There cannot be a doubt but that a spirited and manly deportment in our government towards France, notwithstanding her overbearing temper, would have secured us better treatment, and left us at peace, if we chose it, with the rest of the world. A former administration pursued this policy with success. This is therefore a second powerful reason for improving the present opportunity of placing men in our councils, who are free from foreign attachments and antipathies ; who will resent real injuries ; acknowledge real friends ; and who will not sacrifice the prosperity of our own country to gratify any power whatever.

In one other point of view, the state of our foreign relations merits serious consideration. The situation of Europe is now undergoing a great and important change. The tyranny of France, which has for some time kept European nations in awe, has at last reduced them to desperation. A natural, spontaneous resistance has commenced against her on the continent, and with a success which promises a glorious result, in which the whole world is interested. France, hated by every state in Europe, is losing her influence among them. Her arms cease to be dreaded, and cease to have their effect. There is the strongest probability, that, encouraged by the triumphs of Spain and Portugal, who have led the way in an attempt to recover their independence, other nations, who have the same motives, will pursue the same course. What then is our prospect? Adhering to the cause of France, abetting her usurpations,

cold and even hostile to all who oppose her, our government will secure to itself the hatred and contempt, and exclude itself from the favour of every nation that can or wishes to regain its freedom. We shall make enemies of all the world; for even France, though she will use us for her purposes, does and will treat us as her SLAVE. But a majority, it is to be hoped a *large* majority, of the people of the United States have no share in that enmity, expressed by our government, to the independence of nations whom France has subdued or against whom she is contending. This is a third and increasing motive to place those in power who feel with the people, and who may avert the calamities, which would certainly result from making common cause with France.

I have been cautious, in this sketch of the foreign relations of the United States, to confine myself strictly to points which have been canvassed, and established before the publick. In no one instance do I require an implicit belief of the reader. Let any man candidly examine and consider the publick transactions of our government, the conduct of other nations towards us, and the events which have taken place, and are now evolving in Europe, and he will find in his own breast a consciousness, that what I have said *is true*. To his reason I appeal, whether the inferences are not correct.

There is a very interesting consideration, which I have not yet brought to view, intimately connected with the policy of our government towards foreign nations, though it immediately relates to the administration of our domestic affairs. It has contributed no less than the causes which have been mentioned, to the existing distresses of our country. I mean, *the deep-rooted hostility of the present ruling party to commerce, FROM PRINCIPLE*. To detail the proofs which might be adduced, that Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Madison are, and have been, for twenty years, decided enemies of our commerce would fill a book alone. There would not remain a shadow of doubt of this important fact, at this time, after Jefferson's Report, and Madison's Resolutions, of 1794, if these men had not always made the EXTENSION of commerce their *professed object*, while its ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION was *the certain end of*

their measures. But men's *real* intentions are best ascertained by their actions. If we attend to the conduct of our administration, we cannot doubt their hostile views, as it respects commerce. *France* has done all in her power to drive us from the ocean. With her, our rulers have had no collision. Her rapacity has favoured their object. Instead of shewing resentment, they have made French aggressions an argument for abandoning the sea! *Great Britain*, since our peace with her, has always recognized our commercial rights, but to prevent our enjoying them, our administration fabricate difficulties. Under pretence of seeking new and enlarged privileges, they demand what is unreasonable and unattainable, and what they well know, cannot be conceded, while *Great Britain* is able to defend herself. Her refusal is then represented a national grievance; and feigning an expectation of coercing her to yield, measures are adopted at home, which at once cut up all our trade, root and branch. *Thus*, under the mask of patriotism and a regard for our rights, we are deprived of them, by the act of our own government; we are compelled to remain shut up in our ports, with a certain prospect that other channels of trade will be formed, between other nations, and new relations established; so that if at length, we force our way through these unnatural and impolitic barriers, we shall find our place supplied by others, and ourselves excluded. Had Mr. Jefferson proposed to Congress to pass a Resolve, declaring that commerce was an injury to our country, and therefore should be abolished forever, he would have shocked too many of his partisans, and the project would have failed. He has taken a less honest, but a more successful method, and our commercial prosperity is at an end. Innumerable embarrassments have already been experienced, but the final consequences can yet scarcely be conceived. The gains of many prosperous years are yet circulating in the community, but they are wasting away. He who has money at command, though it is daily diminishing, and he has no means of acquiring more, finds himself growing poorer, but does not yet realize the misery of total destitution. When it is gone, and there remains no means of supply, it is then, and then only, poverty becomes insupportable.

By the destruction of commerce the merchant and mariner are the first sufferers; but the shock soon extends to every class of society. The cultivator of the soil finds no demand for his surplus produce. The largest portion of mechanicks, those for whom commerce or the enlargement and improvement of our seaport towns, the consequence of a flourishing trade, found employment, become useless. The value of land, of labour, and of every species of industry must sink. In short; let the present system be pursued, and it is impossible not to foresee that it will most certainly terminate in the GENERAL IMPOVERISHMENT OF THE COUNTRY.

Citizens of Massachusetts;—a little consideration will convince you that you are threatened with all these evils. Your experience has already given you a specimen of the consequences which will result from the sacrifice of commerce; your reason and observation must convince you that this sacrifice is contemplated; that it is one grand object of the measures under which you are suffering. Happily *the constitution of your country offers you the means of relief*. It is not in the wisdom of man to recover our national prosperity at once from the blow it has received; we have lost friends who must be regained by a just and impartial policy. We have destroyed connexions which time and enterprise had formed, and which, with the most favourable management of our affairs, time and enterprise only can renew. Give those an opportunity of completing their purposes, who have brought you to this state, and your doom is certain. There are among you, wise and trusty men, who think with you, and who feel with you: men whose known sentiments are averse to that untoward policy, which has involved our country in troubles, and threatens its destruction. Select such men to represent you in our national Legislature. To their patriotism commit the guidance of our publick concerns. With the smiles of Providence, our beloved country will again prosper, individual happiness will be restored, and our government once more merit and command the respect of foreign nations.

The work of political reformation is happily begun ; changes have been secured, as to the members of the next Congress, in several important and distinct sections of the Union. To those, who wish *permanent* prosperity to this country, it will be observed with pleasure, this revolution, which promises us, ere long, a favourable turn, in our national policy, is by no means confined to the subject of the Embargo. The people are devoting their attention to its pretended causes. The measures of the Administration are not only felt to be oppressive, but the *principles* on which they justify their conduct are, every day, more clearly and more generally perceived to be erroneous.

I might here swell this Tract, by quoting documents, without number, to prove that the sentiments I have advanced, and the views I have taken, accord with the publick voice. These I have omitted for sake of brevity. I have however taken the liberty, *in stating the complaints, urged by government against Great Britain, and in replying to them*, to adopt the arrangement and nearly the language of an excellent and spirited *Address to the people of the County of Essex*, recently published by delegates from the several towns in that County, and presume that an authority so respectable will have more weight than the opinion of any individual.

It only remains, fellow citizens, that we pursue this course with zeal and firmness. We are republicans ; the return of our federal elections gives to the people the power of controlling future measures. We have but to preserve an unbiassed regard to the GOOD OF OUR COUNTRY, and in so doing, we shall be certain of promoting the interest, happiness and prosperity of EVERY INDIVIDUAL IN THE COMMUNITY.

A FELLOW SUFFERER.

October 10, 1808.





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